

one and make it beat. Americans can send a person to the moon and bring him back or her back. But we struggle to teach our kids how to read and write and understand the meaning of their diplomas when we have 18 years to do it.

Now, there are a lot of reasons for that, and I am sure not blaming anybody, and I don't want to digress. But my point is, we were struggling before the coronavirus. That should tell us that now more than ever, given our circumstances before the coronavirus, we need to take meaningful steps to get these schools back open.

We know that it is safe. The CDC Director under President Trump has said it was safe. The CDC Director under President Biden has said it is safe.

Vaccination across America is—we started out a little rocky, a lot like our testing program, but it is getting much better.

I read an article the other day in the Wall Street Journal, written by a Johns Hopkins researcher, physician, who said, in his opinion, about six or seven times more Americans have had the coronavirus than we know of; therefore, they do have immunity. And he said, coupled with the number of people who have had and survived coronavirus and our vaccine program, which is getting more aggressive every day, we could have a substantial reduction in the number of coronavirus cases by March and April. Indeed, we have seen the decline in the number of our cases now, today, starting from early January. They have declined dramatically. And people smarter than me have suggested it is our vaccines, it is the approach to herd immunity, and, of course, it is the habits that we have developed in terms of social distancing and masking and good hygiene.

But my point is that the experts, the science, all tell us that it is safe. And I have to tell you, I don't mean to be unfair because I know it is complicated, or it can be, and I don't mean disrespect, but I have been very, very disappointed with President Biden. He has flipped and flopped on this issue like a banked catfish. He has said we need to follow science, but he refuses to follow the science in terms of opening our schools.

We know it can be done because we have been doing it in Louisiana. We have done it. If you look nationwide at the number of private schools that are open, back with in-person education, the number of parochial schools, the number of Catholic schools—they are doing it. Why can't we do it in our public schools?

It is not money. For our first five coronavirus bills—I am not counting President Biden's proposed bill. Through our first five coronavirus bills, we have appropriated between \$70 billion and \$80 billion to our public schools to get them back open. Our public schools have spent \$5 billion out of 70 to 80—I think it is \$70 billion. So it is not a matter of money. I think it

is just—I am not sure what it is. I don't want to be a cynic and say that it is a matter of will. But here is what I am asking President Biden to do; here is what I would do if I were King for a day. I am not; I don't aspire to be. But here is what I am hoping that President Biden will do this afternoon: Call a press conference, and look the American people in the eyes, and look our school board members in the eyes and our teachers and our parents and our maintenance workers and say that we need to open up.

If we really believe we are only as good as our dreams, we are only as valuable as our children, then we need to act like it. And I think President Biden needs to call that press conference. He doesn't need to talk about the science, though that is important, or the politics or nibble around the edges. He needs to look the American people in the eye and say: By God, open the schools. Open the schools. Our kids deserve no less.

There is not much I agree with former Congressman and Mayor Rahm Emanuel on, even though I think he is a bright guy, but politically we approach the world differently. But he said when he was mayor that kids drop out—not in the 12th grade. They drop out in pre-K and kindergarten and the first, second, third, and the fourth grades. We are going to lose a whole generation of kids here.

I see I have some additional time while we are waiting on Senator SCHUMER. I think I am going to take my additional time—and I will cut it short if Senator SCHUMER is here—to talk about another issue.

RUSSIA

Mr. President, I want to talk about the European Union's approach to Russia. We know that in February, the Russian Government sentenced Alexei Navalny, a very prominent opposition leader to Mr. Putin, to almost 3 years in prison. And shortly afterward, Mr. Putin directed that thousands of Mr. Navalny's supporters who were protesting be arrested.

What was he—what were his supporters—arrested for? Criticizing Mr. Putin. Navalny's imprisonment comes in the wake of his near-fatal poisoning, about which we have all read. And what happened to Mr. Navalny should be a wake-up call to our friends in Europe. It is certainly a wake-up call to the American people.

This isn't the first time that Mr. Putin has tried to get rid of a dissident. Unfortunately, it probably won't be the last. For years, Russia has been making trouble, both at home and abroad. Mr. Putin has made trouble here in America, about which we all know. Domestically, opponents of Mr. Putin have been arrested. They have died in prison. In some cases, they have been murdered. We all know that.

Now, if this is how Mr. Putin is going to treat his own people, imagine how he would and has treated foreign countries, particularly our friends in Eu-

rope. Russia has launched an unjustified invasion of Georgia. It still controls large parts of Georgian territory. In 2014, Mr. Putin invaded Ukraine. He illegally annexed the Crimea. He started a war in Eastern Ukraine. It cost about 14,000 lives.

But Russia's aggression—Mr. Putin's aggression—and let me say, I am not impugning the people of Russia. They are wonderful people. I admire them deeply. But their leadership, their political leadership, is lacking. And Mr. Putin's aggression begs the question: If NATO troops did not stand in the way, what else would Russia do? Who knows what would happen to Poland and the Baltic States and other countries that were once part of the Soviet sphere.

The Economist puts it this way—I am going to quote:

Russia's gangsterism has become impossible to ignore.

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But our friends in Europe seem to be doing a pretty good job of it.

The Navalny case shows that criticizing the Kremlin comes with a cost, but it is a cost that we and the European Union can and must bear because the price of appeasement is too high. And our European friends can do it, taken as a group. Senator SCHUMER knows this. The EU's power surpasses Russia's by far. The EU is a bloc of 450 million people. Its GDP is nine times larger than Russia's.

Russia's economy is only slightly bigger than Spain's, and it is smaller than the economy of Italy. A lot of people don't realize this, but Russia—look, I will concede them this: They have nuclear weapons and good spies. But the economy of Russia is smaller than the economy of New York State. So why is Europe so content to be bullied?

I am going to give you a quick case in point. Josep Borrell visited Russia following Navalny's imprisonment. Mr. Borrell is the EU's top foreign affairs official. He allowed—stood there and allowed—Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov—I know Mr. Lavrov. Perhaps you have met him, Mr. President. I understand his personality. He doesn't exhaust himself trying to win friends. But Mr. Borrell, representing the EU, its top foreign official in foreign affairs, stood there and allowed Foreign Minister Lavrov to push him around shamelessly. The Russian Foreign Minister insulted the EU. He called it an unreliable partner while Borrell stood there and said nothing—nothing.

Another example, Germany. Germany is still supporting construction of the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline, a project that is going to leave Europe even more reliant on Russian oil and gas. We are going backward here. This is going to make the EU even more vulnerable to Russian influence because we know that a more independent Europe becomes—the more Europe becomes dependent on Russian energy, the more reluctant it will be to defend itself against its neighbor's bullying.

I don't want to beat this point to death. America is ready to do its part. We have imposed sanctions on Mr. Putin. I support President Biden's attempt to engage our friends in Europe and our effort to try to convince China to become a stable part of world order, but we shouldn't forget to do the same thing with respect to Mr. Putin. Mr. Putin's aggression should teach us something: What you allow is what will continue.

I yield the floor to the distinguished Senator from New York.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I thank my friend from Louisiana for his erudite remarks, much of which—at least the last part I heard—I agree with.

#### AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

Mr. President, even now, even as we continue to confirm President Biden's nominees here on the floor, the Senate Democratic majority is busy working on the American Rescue Plan. The country has just suffered from a once-in-a-century event that shuttered thousands of businesses, sapped more than 10 million jobs, and, according to CBO, left a \$17 trillion hole in our economy.

As the distribution of the vaccine finally begins to accelerate under the Biden administration, there is certainly hope on the horizon. But we are a far way off from a full recovery, and it is our job—our job—to help millions of Americans—struggling Americans—through the next several months of difficulty and hasten the day when our country can finally return to normal.

The American Rescue Plan is designed to do just that—keep American families and businesses and schools and workers afloat until they can get back on their feet. And there is a broad consensus that our country needs more support to get through this crisis. Mayors and Governors from both parties support the plan. The Republican Governor of West Virginia told Congress: “[W]e need to go big.”

Economists from across the political spectrum say that our economy needs further support. The Chair of the Federal Reserve, appointed by President Trump, just told us that “the economic recovery remains uneven and far from complete, and the path ahead is highly uncertain.” Chairman Powell, hardly a raving liberal, concluded: “There is a long way to go.”

And it has broad support in America. Seven in 10 Americans approve of the American Rescue Plan. In some polls I have seen, a majority of Republicans approve of this plan—Republican voters, not Republicans here in the Senate.

Now, it is easy to see why there is such broad support. The COVID pandemic is the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, the worst public health crisis our Nation has

faced in 100 years. But our Republican colleagues say all these groups demanding the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan—business leaders, government officials from both parties, economists from across the spectrum, and 7 in 10 Americans—Republicans say all of them are wrong.

According to a report in CNN, Republican leaders are maneuvering to get every single Republican Member to oppose the emerging legislation—every single one.

Make no mistake, Republicans oppose the American Rescue Plan to the detriment of the country, and they do so at their own political peril. If our Republican colleagues want to oppose direct checks to struggling families; food assistance to hungry Americans; keeping teachers, firefighters, and essential public employees on the job; providing another round of support for small business; helping schools reopen as quickly and safely as possible; speeding vaccinations around the country—well, if congressional Republicans want to oppose all that, my response is, good luck.

The country needs this final push. It is overwhelmingly popular. A new analysis this morning showed another vaccine produced by a U.S. company is safe and effective, which only underscores the need for Federal dollars to accelerate its distribution. It will help millions of American families survive the ongoing crisis, recuperate from the economic hardship of the past year, and set our country on a firm path to recovery.

That is why Senate Democrats have made it the first legislative item on our agenda. By stark contrast, the first action item taken by the Republican Senate majority when they got the majority in 2017 was an attempt to repeal our Nation's healthcare law and rip health coverage away from millions of Americans. Republicans followed it up with a giant tax cut disproportionately aimed at rich corporations and the uber-rich.

The Democratic Senate majority is going to start on a much different note. This week, the House—and soon thereafter the Senate—will start working on President Biden's American Rescue Plan to deliver desperately and urgently needed assistance to the American people.

One final note on this topic—the minimum wage. As it has been reported widely, the Senate Parliamentarian is hearing arguments today on the \$15 minimum wage policy included in the House version of the bill. According to the Congressional Budget Office, raising the Federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour has a significant budgetary impact, which should make it permissible under the Senate's reconciliation rules.

I want to thank all of the hard-working Senate staffers on my staff, Senator SANDERS' staff, and many others in participating in these arguments today.

#### CHINA

Mr. President, on another matter. Everyone knows our country and our economy face daunting challenges beyond COVID-19. While our two parties don't agree on a whole lot, both Republicans and Democrats know that one of the main challenges of the 21st century will be competing with and confronting China.

The roots of this challenge go back decades. When I was first elected to the Senate visiting all corners of New York, I saw entire industries going under as a result of unfair Chinese competition and the manipulation of the currency by China. For decades, China has effectively cheated and stolen its way to economic growth, engaging in brazen theft of American intellectual property via cyber operations, forced technology transfers, the dumping of cheap goods in our economy, and for a while, the pernicious manipulation of its currency. American workers, academics, and businesses of all sizes have paid the price to the tune of millions of jobs and trillions of dollars of wealth.

More recently, China has directed its energy and mercantilist policies toward beating the United States and like-minded countries to the pole position on all leading technologies in the 21st century.

When I say “China,” I mean the Chinese Government and the China Communist Party. The American people have nothing against the Chinese people.

I have made no secret of America's failure to hold the Chinese Government accountable, and that has been a failure of both parties—both parties in the past. After another bout of tough talk, we are not much closer to reining in China's predatory behavior than we were 4 years ago. That is why yesterday, I asked the chairs and members of our relevant Senate committees to begin work on legislation to enable the United States to outcompete China and create American jobs.

At the core of this effort will be the Endless Frontier Act. This is a bipartisan legislation that Senator YOUNG and I sponsored and drafted together over a year ago. It would surge resources into the National Science Foundation and the Department of Commerce to advance American innovation in a number of critical technologies.

We must also consider significant investments, even through emergency appropriations, to rebuild the capacity of the U.S. semiconductor industry. This, too, is a bipartisan effort that Senators COTTON and CORNYN joined Senator WARNER and I, and we placed the original authorizing legislation in the Defense bill.

Right now, semiconductor manufacturing is a dangerous weak spot in our economy and in our national security. Our auto industry is facing significant chip shortages. This is a technology the United States created, and we